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The Sinister Hand

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"Conspiracy has been a familiar theme in our political discourse," Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. wrote last year. "It expresses itself today in the notion on the right that the communists are fomenting the antiwar demonstrations in the United States." This year, the right has lost its monopoly on the notion, which is seriously engaging the Administration. In reporting the big antiwar demonstrations that took place on April 15, *The Christian Science Monitor* said on its front page: "The discontent which many Americans feel about the war in Vietnam was visible in New York, where an estimated 125,000 peace advocates gathered, and in San Francisco, where between 20,000 and 40,000 marched." But when Secretary Rusk appeared on television April 16, and was asked if he thought that the peace demonstrations were "communist-inspired," he replied - "with a small grin," according to *The New York Times* - "I am giving you my responsible personal view that the communist apparatus is working very hard on it."

The day of the demonstrations, the White House announced that President Johnson was studying an FBI report on "antiwar activity" in the country, hot from the hand of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Curious newsmen asked Press Secretary George Christian if the Hoover report raised charges of communist influence. Christian refused to go into that, said it was sheer coincidence that the report had arrived that day, that the President got memos from Mr. Hoover "on a regular basis, whenever he has anything to report." Christian added that he himself had announced receipt of such reports in the past, only he couldn't remember the dates. "Neither," commented United Press International with a suspicion of dry wit, "could newsmen."

Two weeks before the April 15 demonstrations, the House Un-American Activities Committee published a report called "Communist Origin and Manipulation of Vietnam Week (April 8-15)." The HUAC report confidently forecast: "Such success as the instigators and organizers of Vietnam Week may have in staging anti-US demonstrations April 8-15, and in turning out large numbers of people for the New York and San Francisco demonstrations, must be attributed primarily to the communists." The HUAC report is a wholly undeserved tribute to the terrifying powers of Bettina Aptheker, who said last fall she had in mind to spearhead a student revolution she hoped would replace this country's form of government. She got 32 sponsors of a nationwide student strike, and HUAC calls attention to the sinister fact that, of the 32, two were, like herself, "the offspring of

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known communists." Calls then went out to "Dear Students, Professors and Friends," announcing that a conference to plan a student strike would be held at the University of Chicago on December 28 and 29, 1966. But meanwhile Miss Aptheker had managed to secure another 160 sponsors, and the HUAC report says, "they made it appear that she was no more than one of the 193 sponsors of the call." And so, by then, she was. Anyhow, the alleged attempt at self-concealment did her little good. True, 257 persons attended a meeting held at the University of Chicago at the end of December to discuss the idea of a nationwide student strike. And they included representatives of the Communist Party of the United States, which is currently pro-Russian, of the Progressive Labor Party which is pro-Peking, the Socialist Workers Party which is Trotskyist, and the Youth Against War and Fascism, which is a Trotskyist splinter group. But, as almost anyone except perhaps HUAC could have guessed, they were soon at one another's throats. The PLP, for instance, attacked everyone else as a "revisionist." Also present were non-communists, like Eugene Groves, president of the National Student Association, who said, "I'm here to decide what role NSA can play," and Professor Sidney M. Peck, of the Inter-University Committee for Debate on Foreign Policy, the organization that began teach-ins. There were a number of non-events, duly noted by the HUAC report. Rev. James L. Bevel, on leave from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, did not appear; a film called *Sons and Daughters*, scheduled for the evening session, was not shown. Registration fees netted only \$300, indicating that a lot of the 257 delegates failed to produce the \$2 fee. The biggest non-event of all was that "it was generally agreed that a nationwide student strike was not realistic at this time."

So the Chicago conference decided instead to support the Vietnam antiwar demonstrations that a different organization, the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, had decided to stage. The Spring Mobilization Committee was formed in Cleveland on November 26 at a meeting of 150 persons. The president was the late A. J. Muste ("has long fronted for communists" - J. Edgar Hoover). The vice chairmen were Edward Keating, editor-in-chief and publisher of *Ramparts*, and David Dellinger, editor of *Liberation*, the "monthly of revolutionary nonviolence." Also present were members of the Students for a Democratic Society. At the end of August, Bettina Aptheker had addressed a convention of the SDS, which turned down her student strike plan as impracticable. In fact, the HUAC report says, not only did the SDS national organization fail to endorse either a student strike or the Vietnam Week idea, but there was "repeated opposition of SDS officials" to both

plans. This didn't prevent some SDS units and members eventually supporting Vietnam Week; HUAC attributes this to SDS "welcoming communists and radicals of all descriptions" to its ranks.

The continuations committee of the Chicago conference set up a New York office that served as the national headquarters of a Student Mobilization Committee. It solicited funds, and published *The Student Mobilizer* that printed antiwar articles. It also ran a piece by Bettina Aptheker, still plugging her plan for a student strike. She hopefully (but, as it proved, fruitlessly) proposed an April 8-14 strike. HUAC regards Miss Aptheker's article in the *Mobilizer* as evidence that the Student Mobilization Committee, like the Spring Mobilization Committee, was "dominated" by communists. The HUAC report also cites an ad, appealing for funds, that the Student Mobilization Committee placed in the March 12 issue of *The Worker*, headed: "The CIA Doesn't Support Us! We Need You!" According to HUAC, there were similar goings-on at the West Coast headquarters of the Student Mobilization Committee, "located at 2495 Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley, which is the headquarters of Women for Peace, an organization which, since it was first formed in the fall of 1961, has enjoyed the complete support of the Communist Party."

The overwhelming majority of the 150,000 Americans who took part in antiwar demonstrations in New York and San Francisco on April 15 almost certainly knew nothing, and probably care less, about what went on behind the organizational scenes between last November and this month. They ought to read the HUAC report on it; for sheer entertainment value, it's hard to beat for 50 cents. But will they, or anyone else, buy HUAC's conclusion that, "The constant professions of a desire for 'peace' which have appeared in the literature and publicity related to Vietnam Week are completely insincere"? HUAC hotly denies that the purpose of its report is to "stifle honest and legitimate dissent." It insists that, "Nothing could be farther from the truth." But it all depends on what's meant by "honest" and "legitimate." According to HUAC, the only kind of dissent meriting those adjectives is the sort that adds to the public's "appreciation of the basic correctness of the policy our government is pursuing." Is that what the President and Rusk think?

Tarfoot

As the *Torrey Canyon* slowly split in two on the Seven Stones, staining British beaches with 120,000 tons of crude oil, many could recall milder forms of pollution on ocean beaches - the oil and tar on bare feet and bathing suits. Each year this contamination increases.